



Classroom Guide for **GEORGE CRUM AND THE SARATOGA CHIP**

written by **Gaylia Taylor**
illustrated by **Frank Morrison**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Guided Reading Level: Q

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Inventions, Food/Cooking, Family, Persistence, African American Interest

Synopsis

Growing up in the 1830s in Saratoga Springs, New York, wasn't easy for George Crum. Picked on at school because of the dark color of his skin, George escaped into his favorite pastimes—hunting and fishing. Soon George learned to cook as well. As a young man, after many attempts and rejections, George finally landed a job as a chef at Moon's Lake House, one of the best restaurants in Saratoga Springs. George loved his work but was impatient with fussy customers, whom he felt were overly demanding and quick to complain. One day George's patience boiled over at a customer who wanted to tell him how to cook the newest food craze—French fried potatoes. In a frenetic effort to appease the customer, George sliced the potatoes so thin that they turned crisp and brown when fried. Amazingly the customer loved the crisp potatoes, and a brand new treat was created.

George Crum's potato chips soon became famous and their sales helped George start his own restaurant. He welcomed people of all backgrounds, societies, and statures, and asked only that they enjoy the delicious food.

Background

The story of George Crum is part biography, part culinary history, and part legend. There are questions and conflicting information surrounding the creation of the potato chip, including the identity of the restaurant patron who complained about the French fries. For a time there were claims that shipping and railroad giant Cornelius Vanderbilt was the picky customer. However, it seems likely this was not the case. There has also been speculation that George's sister, Kate, had a hand in the creation of his signature dish. As with many spur of the moment inventions, it is hard to get every detail pinned down.

Potato chips are one of America's favorite snack foods, if not *the* favorite snack food in the country. About 1.2 billion pounds are eaten each year. Some fun potato chip facts to share with students can be found online [here](#).

Teaching Tip

George Crum and the Saratoga Chip is a great story to read during African American history month. It may also be used to introduce a unit on inventors or a unit on food.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. What is your favorite snack food? What do you think it is made from?
2. Do you have a hobby? Would you like to turn this hobby into a career? Why or why not?
3. Can you tell us about an inventor you have heard of? How does the person's invention help others?
4. What does the phrase "to be treated equally" mean to you? What are some ways people are not treated equally? What are some ways we can make sure everyone is treated equally?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read the title. Ask students what they think the title means. What is a Saratoga chip? What kind of work does the man in the picture do?

Display the back cover and talk about the illustration. Ask students to use this image plus the one on the front cover to predict what the story might be about.

Walk students through the book, looking carefully at the illustrations. Encourage students to note when and where the story seems to take place. Also note the expressions on the faces in the illustrations. Explain to students that these expressions help tell the story.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Ask students to read to find out who George Crum was, what he invented, and what George Crum thought was important in life.

VOCABULARY

Write the following words from the story on the chalkboard. Have students look up any unfamiliar words and then write a definition or description for each word. Finally, ask students to write a sentence or two using each word.

encourage iridescent fashionable graciously	strut amuse feistiness	fascinate technique mischievous	imitate prominent inferior
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AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

Literal Comprehension

1. Was George a good student in school? How do you know?
2. What kind of relationship did George have with his sister? What are some examples of this in the story?
3. Where did George feel most comfortable? What were his favorite hobbies?
4. Besides his sister, who else helped to change the course of George's life? How did these people help George?
5. What inspired George to fry up a batch of very thin, crisp potato slices? What was the customer's reaction to the fried potatoes? How did George feel after the customer tasted the potatoes?
6. Why was George's potato creation called Saratoga chips? What do we call them today?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

7. What was it that George "did not like in the least"? What are some examples of this in the story?
8. How did George feel about being a chef at Moon's Lake House? Cite some parts of the story that illustrate how he felt.

9. How did George respond when customers complained about the food he cooked? Do you think the customers' complaints were fair? Why do you think so?
10. Why did George decide to leave Moon's Lake House after cooking there for several years?
11. What kind of restaurant did George open? How was it different from Moon's Lake House?
12. The story says that "everyone was equal at Crum's Place (George's restaurant)." What does this mean? Why was this important to George?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for the passages that indicate times when George overcame prejudice or obstacles.
- The **Illustrator** might create a poster or an advertisement for Crum's Place.
- The **Connector** might choose one or two other popular snack foods and compare their "healthy eating" profiles to potato chips. (This can be done by checking the ingredients lists and nutrition facts panels on the packaging.)
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each section of the book that the group reads.
- The **Investigator** might find information about some other food-related inventors and/or inventions. Some preliminary ideas can be found online [here](#).

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. In the Author's Note it says that George Crum has a "colorful personality." What does this mean? Do you know anyone with a colorful personality? How is that person "colorful"?

2. Would you want to work with George Crum in his kitchen? Why or why not?
3. How does Moon's Lake House compare to restaurants with which you are familiar? How does Crum's Place compare to restaurants you know about?
4. What attributes did George possess that made him successful in a world that wasn't always fair to him?
5. How did the end of the story make you feel? Do you think George Crum was happy at the end of the story? Why or why not?
6. Make a timeline of events in the story. Have each student put a star beside his or her favorite event. Students may then discuss their favorite events.
7. Create a menu of dishes for Crum's Place. Each dish on the menu should be accompanied by a description. Try to use bold adjectives in the descriptions.
8. Write a restaurant review of Crum's Place. You may need to read a few restaurant reviews first so you know the kinds of information a review includes.
9. For students familiar with the civil rights movement that began in the 1950s: discuss how the events in George Crum's life fit into the larger civil rights struggle that came decades later.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. After the first reading, go back through the story page-by-page and have students orally summarize what happens, using the illustrations to provide clues to the action.
2. Have each ELL student write three questions about the story. Then have students pair up with strong English speakers/readers and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Ask ELL students to work in groups and create a list of threshold words they do not know to use as vocabulary words for the week. Pose the words of each group and refer to them during the week.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. Have students research the history, culture, and arts of Saratoga Springs, New York. Why was this city attractive to wealthy people during George Crum's lifetime? What is the city known for today?
2. Have students look up other African American (Black) inventors. Several are listed on the Web at [Famous Black Inventors](#) and [Scholastic Teachers](#). Students may write reports or profiles and give presentations about their inventors to the class.

Language Arts

3. Have students think about their favorite hobbies. Let volunteers give a short "how to" talk describing how someone could learn about this pastime. If appropriate, the presenters could include an activity for the class, with directions for completion.
4. [Yum! ¡MmMm! ¡Qué rico!](#) contains several haiku about foods native to the Americas. Read some of the haiku with students. Then challenge them to write their own haiku about their favorite foods.

Science/Food

1. Have students research the nutritional value of potato chips compared to "plain" potatoes (boiled or baked). Then have them do the same for corn (or tortilla) chips and "plain" corn (on the cob or kernels). For a normal serving, students should compare calories, fat, sodium, protein, vitamins, and fiber. Then help them understand how to evaluate the nutritional value of each food and decide which are the healthier foods.
2. Interested students might want to investigate why foods turn crisp when they are deep fried.
3. If possible, have a potato tasting with the class. Provide potatoes prepared in a variety of ways: potato chips, French fries, baked potatoes, boiled potatoes, mashed potatoes, potato salad, potato pancakes, and so on. You may also wish to include some dishes made with sweet potatoes. Have each student taste all the potato dishes and write down at least three adjectives to describe each food. Then chart students' words to develop a common description for each potato dish. You may also wish to discuss the foods relative to the four basic tastes: sweet, bitter, sour, and salty.

Art

Have students create bag labels or other packaging for George Crum's Saratoga chips.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gaylia Taylor discovered her passion for writing children's stories during her years as a reading teacher. Now retired, Taylor finds inspiration in newspaper articles, travel experiences, and memories of her childhood. She discovered George Crum's story while researching African American inventors. Taylor lives in Norfolk, Virginia, with her husband. This was her first picture book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Frank Morrison is a fine artist and the illustrator of several children's books, including Lee & Low's *Sweet Music in Harlem*, a Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year and an IRA Notable Book. Morrison's artwork is included in many private collections, including those of Bill Cosby and Maya Angelou. Morrison lives with his family in Atlanta, Georgia.

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about ***George Crum and the Saratoga Chip*** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/52/hc/george_crum_and_the_saratoga_chip

BookTalk with Gaylia Taylor:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/gaylia.mhtml>

Order Information**On the Web:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/52/hc/george_crum_and_the_saratoga_chip (secure on-line ordering)

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